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¶1. (SBU) Ambassador raised reftel points with President Jose Ramos-Horta of Timor-Leste. Ramos-Horta reported that neither he nor the government of Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao has given consideration to becoming a candidate for one of the four seats in the Asian group of the UN Human Rights Council to open in ¶2010. He expressed reluctance to do so, primarily due to a) the council's 'lack of effectiveness' and b) Timor-Leste's failure to secure election to the council at an earlier opportunity - 'we would not want a second defeat'. He said he would speak to the Prime and Foreign Ministers regarding a potential Timorese candidacy, but predicted there would not/not be strong interest in pursuing a bid.

¶2. (SBU) Were it to become a candidate, Timor-Leste would bring with it a positive record of commitment to specific-country human rights (a legacy in part of being a beneficiary of international human rights attention and concern during the 1975-1999 Indonesian occupation), a strong record of alignment with the United States on key UN votes (the best by far among Southeast Asian countries (although Timor-Leste's friendly relations with Cuba make it unlikely to break ranks on Cuba-related votes), and a marked tendency to be independent of Asian regional voting trends. Timor-Leste's staff capacity, however, at both its missions in New York and Geneva is weak. Ramos-Horta acknowledged that should Timor-Leste find itself on the council, it would have to increase its staff in Geneva to handle the demands of membership. The issues raised by Ramos-Horta are more fundamental to his decision-making, however. Unless he can be convinced that membership on the Human Rights Council would be meaningful, and that a second campaign for membership would be successful, Timor-Leste is not likely to run.

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